

## WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA – MILESTONES & CHALLENGES

*Dr. Rakesh Chandra*  
Professor of Philosophy  
&  
Director, Institute of Women's Studies  
University of Lucknow, Lucknow.  
email : [rakeshphilosophy@yahoo.com](mailto:rakeshphilosophy@yahoo.com)

Empowerment is now increasingly seen as a process by which the one's without power gain greater control over their lives. This means control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. It involves power to, power with and power within. Some define empowerment as a process of awareness and conscientization, of capacity building leading to greater participation, effective decision-making power and control leading to transformative action. This involves ability to get what one wants and to influence others on our concerns. With reference to women the power relation that has to be involved includes their lives at multiple levels, family, community, market and the state. Importantly it involves at the psychological level women's ability to assert themselves and this is constructed by the 'gender roles' assigned to her specially in a cultural which resists change like India.

The questions surrounding women's empowerment the condition and position of women have now become critical to the human rights based approaches to development. The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on Population and Development called attention to women's empowerment as a central focus and UNDP developed the Gender Empowerment measure (GEM) which focuses on the three variables that reflect women's participation in society – political power or decision-making, education and health. 1995 UNDP report was devoted to women's empowerment and it declared that if human development is not engendered it is endangered a declaration which almost become a lei motif for further development measuring and policy planning. Equality, sustainability and empowerment were emphasized and the stress was, that women's emancipation does not depend on national income but is an engaged political process.

Drawing from Amartya Sen's work on 'Human capabilities' — an idea drawn from Aristotle a new matrix was created to measure human development. The emphasis was that we need to enhance human well being flourishing and not focus on growth of national income as a goal.

People's choices have to be enlarged and they must have economic opportunities to make use of these capabilities. States and countries would consider developments in terms of whether its people lead a long healthy painless life or no are educated and knowledgeable and enjoy decent standards of living.

The intuitive idea behind the capability is twofold according to Martha Nussbaum (2003) first, that there are certain functions that are particularly central to human life. Second, that there is something do these in a truly human way, not a mere animal way. The list of capabilities that she draws is cross-cultural as necessary element of truly human functioning. They include:

1. Life-being able to live to the end of human life of normal length: not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily health – being able to have good health including reproductive health, to be adequately nourished, to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily integrity – Being able to move freely from place to place, to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sex satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.

4. Senses, imagination and thought – Being able to use the sense, to imagine, think and reason in a truly human way including but not limited to literacy. Being able to use one's mind and imagination protected by freedom of expression.
5. Emotions – being able to have attachments, to love, to grieve to experience longing gratitude and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety.
6. Practical Reason – Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about planning of one's life's protected by liberty of conscience.
7. Affiliation – Being able to live with and toward others to have social interactions, to have the capability of both justice and friendship. This would entail freedom of assembly and free speech. Having social bases for self-respect and non-humiliation, being protected against discrimination on the basis of race, sex sexual orientation religion caste or region.
8. Other species – Being able to concern with nature.
9. Play – being able to laugh, play and enjoy.
10. Control over one's environment.
  - a) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life, having the right to political participation, protection of free speech and association.
  - b) Material. Being able to hold property to seek employment on equal bases and having freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with the workers.

These capabilities cover the so called "first generation rights" (political & civil liberties) as well as the "second generation rights" (economic and social rights). It has been emphasized that women all over the world have been short shifted and have not found support for their central human functions. Women are capable of these functions given sufficient, nutrition, education and other support. Women are most often not treated as subjects. Women are as capable as men of exercising will, controlling desires and taking decisions but males enjoy support of social institutions and women are excluded as the 'other'. Women are often not treated as "ends in themselves" persons with dignity who deserve respect from laws and institutions instead they are treated instrumentally as reproducers, caregivers, sexual receivers, agents of family's general prosperity.

Human development report since 1999 demonstrate that practically no country in the world treats its women as well as men according to the measures of life expectancy wealth and education. Developing countries present especially urgent problems where caste and class result in acute failure of human capabilities of women. Women in this part of south East Asia lack essential support for fully functioning human lives. Within the country there are many issues to be addressed closely.

### **GDI: Inter State Comparison**

The virtues of a measure such as the GDI, which can project the status of women by encapsulating achievements in three basis dimensions, soon become clear to policy makers. It spurred efforts to rank States in India by calculating their GDI (Shiv Kumar 1966, Seeta Prabhu, Sarkar and Radha 1996; Aasha Kapur Mehta 1996; Hirway and Mahadevia 1996). A comparison of the HDI and GDI reveal that in Punjab, Haryana, Bihar. West Bengal and Rajasthan development has been inequitous and women did not get equal share in the development. For Uttar Pradesh which has the lowest HDI rank as well as the lowest GDI rank, the challenge is to see how men and women can move from being equal partners in slow development to partners in dynamic growth.

Empowerment of women is a commitment for PACS and some others strategic programmes, while developing strategies for empowering women some programmes are sensitive to recognizing women's contribution and their knowledge as the first step. The appreciate that women require principally social support to fight their sense of inadequacy and fears to enhance their self-respect and dignity. Empowering women means control over their bodies and becoming economically independent, controlling resources like land and property and reduction of burden of work. A society or programme which aims at women's empowerment needs to create and strengthen sisterhood and to promote overall nurturing, caring and gentleness. PACS emphasis on emphasis on women SHG's as a collective is one such efforts. Being conference 1995 had identified certain quantitative and qualitative indicators of women empowerment.

**Beijing conference 1995 indicators of women empowerment, qualitative & quantitative**  
**Qualitative:**

1. increase in self-esteem, individual and collective confidence;
2. increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness on health, nutrition reproductive rights, law and literacy;
3. increase an decrease in personal leisure time and time for child care;
4. increase on decrease of work loads in new programmes;
5. change in roles and responsibility in family & community;
6. visible increase on decrease in violence on women and girls;
7. responses to, changes in social customs like child marriage, dowry, discrimination against widows;
8. visible changes in women's participation level attending meeting, participating and demanding participation;
9. increase in bargaining and negotiating power at home, in community and the collective;
10. increase access to and ability to gather information;
11. formation of women collectives;
12. positive changes in social attitudes;
13. awareness and recognition of women's economic contribution within and outside the household;
14. women's decision-making over her work and income.

**Quantitative indicators:**

**A. demographic trends**

- maternal mortality rate
- fertility rate
- sex ratio
- life expectancy at birth
- average age of marriage

**B. Number of women participating in different development programmers**

**C. Greater access and control over community resources/government schemes-crèche, credit cooperative, non formal education**

**D. Visible change in physical health status and nutritional level**

**E. Change in literacy and & enrollment levels**

**F. Participation levels of women in political process** Monitorable targets for the Tenth Plan and beyond had certain key issues related to gender.

- All children in school by 2003; all children to complete five years of schooling by 2007.
- Reduction of gender gaps in literacy and wage rates by at least 50% by 2007.
- Reduction of IMR to 45 per 1000 live births by 2007 and 28 by 2012.

- Reduction of maternal mortality ratio (MMR) to 2 per 1000 live births by 2007 onto to by 2012.

India's declining sex ratio caused through foeticide, infanticide and systematic neglect requires urgent and comprehensive action. It is well evidenced that low literacy, endemic under nutrition and social inequality are closely related gender inequality is a crucial antecedent to endemic undernutrition.

### **Education:**

Women's education is extremely important intrinsically as it is their human right and required for the flourishing of many of their capacities.

It is, however, noticed that most programmes for education of girls and women in India have reinforced Gender roles specially motherhood in curriculum as well as impact evaluation. The huge study of nearly 94% of India's population done by Dreze and others looks at female literacy and its negative and statistically significant impact on child mortality.

The questions of power are interlinked and we understand that what is necessary is both objective power in terms of economic resources, laws, institutional roles and norms held by others as well as subjective power in terms of self efficacy and entitlements. Empowerment of women is closely related to formal and informal sources of education. Late 19<sup>th</sup> century & 20<sup>th</sup> century reformers advocated women's education as a principal strategy to answer the 'women's question'. Many innovative efforts are accelerated after the NPE. In UP a renewal process of correcting gender stereotyping was initiated in 1998 looking at textbooks and training besides infrastructure and community mobilization. There is marked improvement in girls enrollment and steady decline in drop out rates.

Despite statistically positive trends closer studies show that privileged spaces in classrooms are occupied by boys. Girls are rarely addressed by their names. Girls sit in last rows in classes of mathematics and rarely muster courage enough to come close to the board where the teacher sits (usually a male in most remote areas? Private school initiative for gender concerns is rare Madarsas have large number of girls but like convents and Arya Kanya Pathshala's gender transformation is not their agenda. Moral science text books still have preponderance of men. Women as agents of social reform are not mentioned. CSO efforts have very often shown greater enhancement of girls self-esteem but in many cases there is poor cognitive development generally attributed to low paid, low qualified but highly motivated instructor. Kanya Vidya Dhan, free uniforms, mid-day meal, school attached crèche, mothers meetings have all had positive results.

In various surveys conducted by ISST it has been apparent that parental apathy or opposition to girl child education is fast reading even in traditional male dominated states of north Indian. Given the right infrastructure-schools located in neighbourhoods, preferably with female teachers parents would allow girls to study "as long as they would like to". It may however be noticed as evidenced by researchers, the same families who are willing to see girls in college react violently if the girl decides to choose her partner in marriage or challenge other norms of feminine behavior.

### **Health:**

2005-06 National Family Health Survey (NFHS -3) conducted through 18 research organizations between 2005 December and August 2006 provides us with several important data based insights not provided by earlier surveys. There has been a steady increase in institutional delivery percentages from NFHS -1 to 3 from 26 to 41 the increase in rural from 17 to 31 is more promising than urban from 58 to 69. Overall fertility rate has declined from 3.4 to 2.7. The states of Punjab and Maharashtra have reached the replacement level of

fertility, i.e. around 2 children per woman. Women in Chhattisgarh and Orissa are expected to have an average of about 2.5 children at current fertility rates. The urban areas in five states studied by NFHS, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa and Punjab have reached below replacement level fertility. There is a difference between the fertility of women with no education and those with 10 or more years of schooling. Trends in antenatal care have remained more or less constant in NFHS – 1 and 2 between rural and urban women but have increased from 65 to 77% total. The five state study shows regional imbalances in post natal care from only 23 per cent in Chhattisgarh to 54-59 per cent in Maharashtra, Punjab and Gujarat.

More than 40% ever married women and about one third men in Orissa and Gujarat are thin for their height, undernutrition is much lower in Punjab (12-14%) obesity is the major problem in Punjab 38% women are overweight. Overweight or obese women percentage has increased in the last 7 years from 16 to 20 per cent in Gujarat from 12 to 17 per cent in Maharashtra and from 4 to 7 per cent in Orissa. The extent of overweight is greater in women than men. Overall 14.8% women are obese. Except in Punjab in the other states more than 50 per cent of the children of women without any education are underweight. The percentage of anaemia ranges from 38% in Punjab to 63% in Orissa. Anaemia prevalence is alarming among pregnant women 57.9 which is more than last recorded 49.7%. 33% of women still have BMI below normal, which has declined from 36.2. IMR has gone down but gender differences persist. This is true also of under 5 mortality. Life expectancy of women however stands at a level higher than that of men. From 1961 to 2001 both in total population as well as in the population of 0-6 there has been a decline in sex ratio from 943 to 935 and 976 to 927 respectively. There is a fear that overall reduction of state resources in the welfare sector and specially less than 1% investment in health is going to exacerbate the existing gender bias in society.

### **Political Participation:**

Women's political participation has been considered a major measure of women's empowerment. Globally, through histories of the world we have records of very few regents, sovereigns, and active agents in nobility who were women. Champions of liberalism like John Stuart Mill had advocated women's participation in governance by the struggle for women suffrage in the self avowed liberal west very well illustrates the entrenched nature of Patriarchal resistance to women's empowerment. In the last century more women heads of state could be counted in Asia as compared to Europe and the struggle for women suffrage in India was physically less violent but this is not reflective of greater acceptance of women in decision-making in public spaces.

To measure women's empowerment now GEM takes 3 indicators, women's participation in economic, political and professional activities. Within political power what is measured is mainly women in parliament, judiciary or in local bodies. Women's empowerment or disempowerment has to be seen in all areas physical, socio cultural religious, political legal and economic.

It is also now often pointed out that women's empowerment must be seen as a process where in we must consider women's awareness consciousness, choices with live alternatives, resources at their disposal, voice, agency and participation. These are all related to enhancement of women's capabilities and decisions they take individually or collectively for themselves.

Several programmes in India like Mahila Samakhya have accepted the process nature of women's empowerment. The understandings of empowerment in PACS has also been similar but planning of activity, time and budgets to ensure the empowering processes need

greater scrutiny. Women's education, livelihood and personal exercise of agency have to be systematically promoted .

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments of the Constitution have impacted nearly 600 million Indian people in 500,000 villages. Interestingly the percentage of women at various levels of political activity have risen from 4-5% to 25-40%. Both nationally as well as at the state and local levels women in elected bodies have been very few and even those who have been elected when observed from closer quarters present a complex picture. The money and muscle associated with the electoral process inhibits a large number of women from joining politics. Restriction on mobility, lack of control over resources and low literacy rates are well known obstacles but recent panchayat elections have evidenced a phenomenally large number of elected leaders much beyond reserved 33% seats. Areas where PACS, Mahila Samakhya or other CSO initiatives are working women are more articulate and vigilant and have used opportunity to improve ICPS centres, primary schools sanitation and have also publicly dealt with issues of misbehaviour with girls, violence and alcoholism as well as sensitive issues of widowed women dressing in coloured clothes. Women are increasingly demanding not only basis but also land literacy and fuller longer trainings instead of being short changed through orientations.

It is obvious that a more active Gram Sabha which is sensitive to women's specific issues is a much desired goal as a woman *sarpanch* or BDC member in a gender hostile *panchayat* may not be able to accomplish and sustain much for the benefit of women or the village community at large. More women in grass root organizations; better law and order will ensure better engagement of women in decision-making.

More than one million women have now entered political life in India and 43% of the seats are occupied by them district, province and national level. Women's participation is understood in terms of voter turn out, number of women contestants apart from the number of those who succeeded in winning.

In an interesting study sponsored by State Planning Commission in U.P. 2006 about 45% women both rural and urban reported being influenced by men of the family (father/husband) in decision-making in the exercise of their ballot. 9 per cent reported external influence while 46 per cent exercise independent choice.

However, the battle to make the PRI's affective instruments of local rural governance is a battle, a struggle of the grass roots, population (women and men) against administrative apathy and listlessness, against ignorance and low awareness. For women these odds are accompanied and intermeshed with deep rooted patriarchal practices that determine and sanction norms of speech and behaviour both within and outside the home.

Thus while Pre election trainings of voluntary organisations and CSVOs serve to build awareness about the duties, responsibilities of PR's and about voting practices, the presence and working of women's voluntary organisations at the grass roots have served to sharpen women's understanding about the operation of patriarchy in personal lives and work places and the methods and practices to overcome and combat them individually and collectively.

Organisations such as Mahila Samakhya working to conscientise and organise women in groups and sanghas are able to address the issue of women and their participation in a two fold manner. On the one hand they organise intensive training programmes for women PRI representatives to make them effective functionaries and on the other hand tghere own programmes with their members within there collectives serve to build a culture of questioning, critical thinking, collective decision-making and mobilisation on public issues.

A mobilised community of women is thus able to raise issues of significance to the local community within the meetings, demand accountability from representatives and administrative officials regarding financial and procedural matters and intervene with creative suggestions.

It is thus that the dominance of patriarchy money power, party politics muscle power are steadily undercut and eroded and women's concerns are gradually pushed to the forefront of local politics.

Drawing from intensive discussions at the level of sanghas and mahasanghas and the experiences culled called from functionaries and from trainings, Mahila Samakhya has drawn out learnings to strengthen women's participation in the Panchayats. A memorandum incorporating these has been presented to the Panchayat Raj Department. It states —

- It is imperative to inscribe the budget for the village on the Panchayat Bhawan.
- There should be rules and strategies to train and activate women members who have been elected to the post of Pradhans or members.
- There should be strict rules for ensuring the participation of 2/3 voters in the open meeting.
- The signatures of the people in the executive register of the open meeting should be ensured.
- It should be compulsory for the Pradhan/Secretary to sit in the panchayat Bhawan.
- The development plan should be widely disseminated so that it can reach the general public.
- The dates and time of the panchayat meetings in the state of U.P. should be decided in advance.
- The venue of the meeting should be either the Panchayat Bhawan or a public place, to enable all gram sabha members to present their problems.

Thus it is apparent that women see effective and efficient functioning of panchayats closely linked to the issue of active women's participation. (Mahila Samakhya U.P. Annual Report 2004-05).

Entry into public space, utilisation of authority in practice, trainings by government and non-government agencies are all part of a process of gradual growth of knowledge, self-esteem and empowerment, which gives women the agency to function effectively in the political process.

Even proxy and dummy candidates may experience this process of empowerment women who stand and win from general seats are more likely to have a higher commitment towards, and an understanding of the political process.

Having a high participation of women at the local self government level can create an environment which is enabling for other women, receptive to the idea of gender based initiatives and can serve to monitor and implement community and gender based programmes of the government related to education, nutrition and health.

It offers a potential opportunity which can be utilised at an optimum level by appropriate trainings both capacity building and information enhancing – by government departments and the NGO Sector.

## **Decision-Making:**

In terms of decision-making NFHS II had reported in the rural areas women take 71% decisions regarding "what items to cook" 26% decisions regarding obtaining health care from herself 10% in purchasing jewellery or other major household items. 12% decisions were taken by women with reference to staying with their parents or siblings and 37% about how to spend money, which they had earned. In the urban areas these figures were 71%, 35%, 13%, 18% and 57% respectively. Women between ages 15 to 19 nearly 24% are not involved in any kind of decision-making only. 14% do not ask permission to go to the market. In rural sector 10% are involved with any decision-making and 74% need permission for going to the market. In urban sector however only 7% are not involved with any decision-making and 53% need permission for going to the market. Survey reports that of the 52% illiterate women 74% of urban resident and 55% of rural resident have access to money. Small studies on elected Panchayat leaders show episodic increase of their decision-making in personal, social and political spaces. Studies of the NFHS scale are necessary to retrieve such data specially in PACs programme areas. This could be done with reference to internal lending of SHG's as well as leveraging through other agencies in terms of both economic status enhancement and their decision-making. Interestingly some studies reflect that women's working outside home in paid job does not always translate into appreciably greater autonomy within the household for most women. In a sample study at Sonapat and Noida 66% need to consult somebody and take permission before changing jobs 27.6% women in Noida and 35.3% in Sonapat said they are allowed to buy nothing at all.

Working outside home women do believe that they have more experience (91.6%), enlarged social networks (48.3%) and stronger personality (32.2%) and an increased self esteem (95.3%) besides their decision-making power (62.2%). The researchers however observe that objective state of affairs do not bear this out and women's decision-making is concentrated to making small purchases. In buying and selling assets they have no say.

Methodologically here there is a dilemma about privileging of perspective – that of the respondent or that of the urban middle class educated researcher. This is particularly pertinent as the sense of being empowered is also importantly about "feeling empowered".

## **Self Help Groups:**

PACS programme has largely utilized SHG's as an empowering instrument. More than 80% of these are exclusively for women. The fifth national synthesis report (Draft) reports that official perception has changed as SHG's are firmly raising voices and SHG's are being used to achieve RTI awareness:

- Women members are elected as PRI representatives.
- SHG/PRI's are regularly organising *Gram Sabha* as a forum for public appraisal.

Anecdotal accounts suggest that women are economically empowered those suffering domestic violence are given legal reference and awareness to prevent child marriage promote girls education and prevent dowry marriage and alcoholism.

Self-help groups have emerged as an important strategy for empowering women and alleviating poverty. SHG's are based on idea of dialogic small groups, which shall function at developing collective consciousness. Linked with micro credit these groups are able to access credit and subsidy to meet crisis needs as well as developmental needs reducing their dependence on money lenders. There is fair amount of evidence to suggest that PACS SHG's have successfully ensured people's entitlements including women.



Statistically PAC's initiatives in realizing entitlements show that – In Balika Samriddhi Yojana 189 females have been benefitted realizing 2572400 Rs. in Employment Guarantee Scheme 55397 women have been provided, 1271 girls enrolled and 9524 women provided Indira Awas Yojna. Kanya Vidya Dhan has been availed by 131 girls while Mahila Samridhi Yojana has benefitted 7 women. Maternity benefits have reached 2943 women and NFE educated 862 women. Old age pension went to 7774 women while no woman benefitted from the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna. Sam Vikas Yojna benefitted 975 women compared to 467 men Bridge courses benefitted 740 girls. Widow pension was ensured to 2948 women and 217 women get yellow cards.

The realization of entitlements has been primarily through RTI, NREGS and the women further train communities. In Jharkhand a large number of women were trained in social audit. In total number of beneficiaries of entitlement 13342 women in Bihar 156217 in Jharkhand 19906 women in Maharashtra 18762 in M.P. and Chhattisgarh and 55114 in U.P. were reached. Men have however benefitted more except in Bihar.

### **Violence:**

The questions regarding crimes against women are most entrenched, as most of them are committed within the family NCRB records that the highest percentage of crime against women is torture (37.7%) followed by Molestation (22.4%), Rape (11.8%), Kidnapping (8.8%) and immoral traffic (3.7%). 4.6 Dowry Death and 6.5% eve teasing were recorded. The further details report that in victims of rape 532 were below 10 and 1090 below 14. 3189 within ages of 30-50. No age is safe for women. In U.P. nearly 32% crimes against women were committed within the family by husbands and relatives. This figure when compounded with 12% dowry deaths makes 45% of crimes domestically located. Incidents of honour killings and battery though not large are often threats to women's functioning and their emotional development is severely blighted. In caste ridden society women's caste membership increases her vulnerability. Small efforts to train police by UN agencies and state initiatives are encouraging but very small in scale. They require follow-ups and support monitoring.

### **Women and Work:**

Women's work is statistically less visible non monetized and relegated to subsistence production and domestic side this accounts for 60% of unpaid family work and 98% of domestic work. The non paid work includes domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, child care and care for the elderly and the handicapped-traditionally understood as women's work. Subsistence activities like pithing, gardening post harvest processing, feeding farm hands, live stock maintenance, gathering of fuel, forest produce, unpaid family labour in family farm or enterprise are done by women who are reported to be non working housewives Census estimates 51.93% men & 25% women workers while NSS estimates 52.7 male and 25.68 female workers. Most men are in stable employment. Micro studies report many challenges – 20 out of 104 women reported in a survey as non working were actually winnowing, thrashing or paraboling (WB). S. Mukhopadhyaya in her study reports 4 times more work participation in her study. Female work participation rate in U.P. is reported as 11% with a Gender gap of 52% equal to West Bengal but less than Punjab. 56% women are in community service 17% in Manufacturing & 8.6 rural women in agriculture. Only 4% women as against 10% men are in the formal sector. If women's work is rendered visible specially unpaid household work there will be many dramatic results. Studies show that working women put 664 hours & others put 872 hours on child care, women's share of work in 55% women's unpaid work is 51% while men's is 33%. R. Malathy's extrapolation estimates 23,773 core as the value of women's household reserve rendered by women in the urban sector alone. From 17% women's contribution will increase to 33% of agricultural earning will include unpaid household work. Restriction on women's

mobility, complete child care responsibility ideology of female seclusion, vulnerability to abuse, low access to information and mass media, low literacy, assumption that women's supplementary and confinement to largely manual untrained tasks leads to women's poor access to income.

### **Women and Reforms:**

It is often argued that economic reforms have had a differential gender impact but there are further complexities. The reforms have meant more openness in trade regime and progressive decontrol of domestic production sector. There seems a steady withdrawal of state presence from the production sector arguing that this would promote greater efficiency and accountability. There has however been much protest that this will leave labour more vulnerable as profit motive alone drives the market. Market argue that since women are crowded towards the bottom end of labour market they will be more adversely impacted. The 55<sup>th</sup> round of National Sample Survey organization (1999-2000) generally reflects that over the years specially in urban areas gender differences in the structure of industrial and occupational distributions and distribution of labour status categories seems to have lessened. There is higher demand of female labour in some sectors which can be linked to a thrust towards export orientation and deregulation in the domestic production sector. According to Swapna Mukhopadhyaya changes in structure of job opportunities have not translated into overall reduction in the degree of market segmentation along gender lines. There is marginal decrease in employment of men and marginal increase for women in urban India. Educated women in the labour market who are unemployed are for more than their male counterparts 62.7% unemployed women in rural areas as compared to 56.9% men. It seems IT enabled sectors in recent years may have benefitted educated women. There is not enough reliable data but persistently low wages of women to the tune of 50% to 80% compare to men suggest systematic wage discrimination. Wage earnings in casual female workers in 1999-2000 were 64.70% of corresponding male earnings in rural India are even lower at 60.57% in urban India. 2005 HDR reports that women spend 457 minutes at work as compared to 391 minutes per day for men.

### **Ownership of Land:**

A recent legislation of the Central Government, the Hindu succession Amendment Act 2005 has also moved towards women's equality in property rights. It makes Hindu women's inheritance rights in agricultural land legally equal to those of men. All daughters including married daughters age Co-parceners in joint family properly daughters now have the right to claim partition and to become 'Karta'. All daughters, married or unmarried can reside, seek partition of the parental dwelling place.

This law of the centre will have the power to displace any conflicting laws of the state which are unequal to women. this is a far reaching message to assure women control over property.

According to a recent study made by Bina Agarwal in Kerala, women's risk of physical violence from husbands is dramatically less of they own hand or a house. The incidence of violence is 49 per cent among women without property, but 18 per cent among land owning women and 7 per cent of they own both land and house.

Recent initiative of the state of U.P. (ordinance of 23 Feb. 2006) regarding the reduction of stamp duty on the purchase of land from 7 per cent 6 per cent has worked in the direction of more land being bought in the name of women in the family. This transfer of asset in favour of women though initially used by male members of the family to save family money will gradually contribute to build women's agency. 2,97,715 transactions have been done in the name of women in 68 districts of Uttar Pradesh between April 2006 and August 2006. The

women move out of their homes to sign the papers in Tehsils and in many cases it is their first exposure to an office. This initiative developed with women's trainings on legal, land and human rights literacy will go a long way.

However, this effectiveness is greatly linked with the willingness of the state administration to devolve effective administrative and financial power to the local self-governing units, and the responsiveness and sensitivity of the lower echelons of the administrative machinery to the aspiration and needs of the local population. Alcohol has not favoured women and increase in indirect taxes has also impacted them poorly. The thrust of budgets also seems to push people to private providers.

Government schemes could be seen as *Relief policies* like widow pension schemes. *Gender reinforcing assistance* like mother support schemes in health and *Empowering schemes* for women to demand and enjoy full human rights.

### **State Initiatives:**

Development writers are so often used to repeating that focus of women development in India has shifted from 'welfare' in the 50's to development in the 70's and now to empowerment. This is hardly borne out in the programmes on the ground. There are largely schemes for relief like old age and widowhood schemes and major schemes related to Gender reinforcing assistance related to reproduction National Institute of Public Finance and Policy undertook the first gender budget exercise and categorized expenditure in 3 categories.

### **National Institute of Public Finance & Policy Gender Analysis of the Budget**

NIPFP undertook the first gender budget exercise and categorized expenditure in 3 categories.

1. Specifically targetted expenditure on women.
2. Pro women allocation – composite expenditure in the women component (at least 30%).
3. Mainstream expenditure with gender differential impact.

It was understood that public expenditure can be clustered in terms of 4 categories:

- a) Protective and welfare services accounting for 67%
- b) Social service-education, water housing health 26%
- c) Economic resources-self employment training fuel supply management 4%
- d) Regulatory services – awareness generation NCW 3%

Allocation for women directed scheme is pitiful. Only ten ministries/Departments have specially targetted schemes for women in India. The share of women specific programmes in departments like education, agriculture, tribal affairs and social justice is also only around one percent. No proper administrative mechanism for execution and monitoring of expenditure. Heads still under rubric of benefits for mother and child. Shelter homes and counselling centres are still low on priority. NIPF observed that reduction in cost of foreign liquor has not positively impacted them.

It is, however, necessary that even though schemes are relief oriented the process of accessing them has often been an individual and collected struggle which has sometimes led to empowerment and at others disheartening. PACS strategy of collective pressure to access public resources for women has largely been empowering though anecdotal.

There are several critical issues to ensure a just an equitable state with reference to gender. Some issues are not addressable due to procedural limitations of data collection which makes specific recommendations difficult. There is need to develop a workable gender audit system for govt. & CSO programmes which would look at targets, training recruitments

promotion, infrastructure and decision making opportunities. The verbal change from women welfare to women rights needs to be converted into reality. This has some direct fall outs. Pitiful allotment for Vriddha and Vidva Pension and minimum wages will have to be reconsidered in terms of living wages, decent work and human right to opportunities for highest form of physical and mental health.

Greatest inequity exists in family but poverty alleviation schemes address only the family. Just as one poverty calculation takes per capita consumption it should also address per capita income enhancement not family.

Gender budgets need participation of other departments besides the existing ones. Gender auditing of all organizations is necessary.

As is evidenced in many studies level of awareness of government schemes is very low so more effective publicity is necessary. A more effective MIS system for monitoring women welfare, women empowerment programmes is to be developed which is simple, transparent and involves both government and non government functionaries. Gender resource centres with autonomy need to be established in all states and in case of larger states there must be more than one such centre involving academic & activities.

Practically no schemes exist to encourage women in non stereo typical occupations. Training of women in leadership market research and entrepreneurship with follow ups must be institutionalized. At the national as well as state levels we need a full fledged mechanism to ensure gender sensitive policy, implementation through a participatory apex body. Clearer definition of work, Joint Pattas for women & men will ensure better control of women over resources as well as their acknowledgement in National income. Country's inclusive agenda requires a consistent engendering at all levels.